DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE

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Producer Education and Preparation key to Soybean Rust Disease

Mississippi Agriculture Commissioner Lester Spell is encouraging farmers, consultants and industry representatives to learn as much as they can about the management of Asian soybean rust and its potential impact on production and yields in 2005.

"Producer awareness and preparedness are the keys to fighting this potentially devastating soybean disease," Spell said. "We must take a proactive approach."

The United States Department of Agriculture confirmed the presence of the fungus-borne disease (*Phakopsora pachyrhizi*) in Mississippi in mid-November as farmers were completing the harvest of more than 1.65 million acres of soybeans. After this initial find of the disease in Adams County, crop samples taken from soybean fields in Washington, Warren, Yazoo, Holmes and Jefferson counties also tested positive.

"The disease appeared at the end of the season rather than during the production year," Spell said. "Yields and production costs were unaffected."

A proactive approach from the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce within the last few years has allowed the department to plan ahead for an outbreak of soybean rust. The department, through the Bureau of Plant Industry, cooperated with the United States Environmental Protection Agency to secure several fungicides to control the disease. The department also worked with research and extension specialists at Mississippi State University to train inspectors, crop consultants and other agricultural personnel in the identification of disease symptoms and the recommended protocol for collecting plant samples.

Through EPA's emergency-use regulation (Section 18) under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide (FIFRA) Act, the department has obtained Section 18 exemptions for several fungicides. The emergency-use exemptions will allow Mississippi farmers the full use of fungicides that were not registered for Asian soybean rust previously. These fungicides include: propiconazole (trade names **Tilt**, **Propimax** and **Bumper**); tebuconazole (trade name **Folicur**); and myclobutanil (trade names **Laredo EC** and **Laredo EW**). "More products may be put on the list as the data on their efficacy and effectiveness on soybean rust become available," Spell said.

Farmers also have several fungicides already available that are labeled for use on Asian soybean rust. These fungicides are: asoxystrobin (trade names **Amistar** and **Quadris**); chlorothalonil (trade names **Bravo Weather Stik**, **Echo 720** and **Echo 90DF**), a combination of asoxystrobin and cholrothalonil (trade name **Quadris Opti**) and pyraclostrobin (trade name **Headline**).

The confirmation of the disease in Mississippi came several days after the United States Department of

Florida, Georgia and South Carolina.

Agricultural specialists have anticipated the arrival of Asian soybean rust in the United States for several years. First identified in Japan in 1902, the disease has gradually spread from Asia to Africa and to South America. The fungal spores are easily airborne and are dispersed by wind patterns resulting from atmospheric disturbances, such as hurricanes and other storms. USDA specialists now speculate that the recent wave of three hurricanes hitting the Southeast in 2004 may have contributed to the arrival of the disease.

As the 2005 production year approaches, farmers and agricultural specialists are keeping a watchful eye on the problem. Educational efforts are at the forefront of management issues that arise from the occurrence of Asian soybean rust. The Mississippi State University Extension Service plans to host a series of educational workshops on soybean rust for farmers in January and February. Farmers can contact their local county Extension office or call the Bureau of Plant Industry at 888-257-1285 for more information.